# Soldiers Online


# The War That Will

Story by Heike Hasenauer


***JUNE 25, 2000**, marks the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War. What came to be called "The Forgotten War" had unfortunately been called "a police action" by President Harry S. Truman, who used that wording to explain why he did not seek a declaration of war from Congress.*

***Because a peace treaty was never signed — only an armistice — the unofficial war remains the longest-running war in history.***

***Sandwiched between the great U.S. and Allied victory of World War II and the unpopular but highly publicized Vietnam War, Korea was a conflict most Americans just wanted to forget, said Dr. William Donnelly of the U.S. Army Center of Military History in Washington, D.C. After all, the war ended in a stalemate, with the North remaining communist and the South struggling toward democracy.***

***And when U.S. troops went home, they did not arrive to heroes' welcomes. They simply returned to society, resumed their lives and tried to forget.***

***The story that follows cannot possibly cover the many battles in which U.S. soldiers fought, or credit the many heroes who deserve recognition. [See our centerspread for a timeline covering the war's events.]***

WORLD War II had been over for five years and had cost more than 405,000 American lives. At home, loved ones wanted nothing more than to keep their husbands and sons out of harm's way.

But it wasn't to be. In fact, many soldiers who had fought in WWII would find themselves, once again, face to face with the horrors of war, said Dr. William Donnelly of the U.S. Army Center of Military History in Washington, D.C.

Others, like Vincent Krepps and his twin brother, Richard, were too young to have experienced WWII. The brothers had just turned 19 when they landed in Pusan in August 1950, with the 2nd Infantry Division.

They didn't even know that the events at the end of WWII had fueled the fire that raged on the Korean peninsula.

When Soviet premier Joseph Stalin declared war on Japan in 1945, Soviet troops entered the Japanese-controlled peninsula from the north during the war's final days.

The United States drafted a plan that called for the Soviet Union to accept the surrender of Japanese forces north of the 38th Parallel, with the understanding that U.S. forces would withdraw south of that latitude. Surprisingly, Stalin agreed.

The division was to be temporary. But neither of the superpowers could allow the other's political system to flourish. By 1948 the two Koreas had each established their own governments — the Soviet-sponsored Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north; the U.S.-sponsored Republic of Korea in the south.

# Not Be Forgotten

That same year the Soviet Union pulled most of its forces out of North Korea, leaving only a few advisors behind. What remained, however, was a strong, well-equipped army; 135,000 troops trained by Soviet officers, plus artillery, planes and some 150 tanks.

Many North Korean troops in June 1950 were combat veterans who had served either with the Soviet army or the Chinese Communist forces, Donnelly said.

By comparison, about 500 U.S. military personnel remained in South Korea as members of the Korean Military Advisory Group, and the 95,000-member ROK army was short of equipment.

South Korean President Syngman Rhee, who had been exiled by the Japanese, had several times threatened to attack North Korea. U.S. military officials feared that, if given tanks, artillery and planes, Rhee would do so.

On Sunday, June 25, 1950, the Cold War that had existed between one-time former allies — the United States and the Soviet Union — turned into all-out war when Stalin agreed to North Korean premier Kim Il Sung's invasion of South Korea.

"Recent work by historians has shown that Kim vigorously lobbied both the Soviet Union's Joseph Stalin and Mao Tse-tung of China to support his plan to conquer South Korea," Donnelly said. And one reason both men agreed to support Kim was that they believed it would be a short war without U.S. intervention.

Historians also cite the possibility of the United States building permanent military bases in Japan and the recent formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization — which militarily united Western Europe and the United States — as contributing to Stalin's decision to support the invasion. Stalin also relished the idea of embarrassing the United States in Korea, some historians have said, thereby weakening the confidence of its allies.


**North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel on June 25, 1950, sparking three years of combat.**

Many have questioned how the United States could have been so taken by surprise. The Army's official history concludes that before the invasion U.S. military officials had received some information indicating "a strong possibility of a North Korean attack." The surprise resulted from errors in analyzing and distributing the information.

U.S. officials certainly knew that Korea and the Soviet Union shared a short border. And the Soviets had trained resistance fighters in the North during the Japanese occupation of

**The 155mm "Long Toms" of Battery B, 937th Field Artillery Battalion, fire on enemy units in November 1951.**


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Korea that began in 1910. Some reports indicate the Soviets hoped that by helping the North they would secure the use of North Korea's warm-water seaports, rich mineral deposits and industrial base.

But, Donnelly said, "North Korean resources were not very important to the Soviets." More important for the Chinese were the North's hydroelectric power stations along the Yalu River, which supplied power to Chinese industry in Manchuria.

At 4 a.m. on June 25 North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel into South Korea, launching numerous attacks on their way to Seoul. By June 28 North Korea had captured the capital.

The North continued its advance southward, disregarding the United Nations Security Council's resolution calling "for immediate cessation of hostilities" and the withdrawal of North Korean forces to the 38th Parallel. The council then authorized formation of a U.N. force, commanded by GEN Douglas MacArthur, to maintain an independent South Korea. Eventually, the force comprised troops from 22 nations.

On the day of the invasion Truman had authorized MacArthur to commit ground forces to Korea. At the same time, Truman was concerned that the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China might enter the war on North Korea's side.

On July 1, 406 infantrymen of the 24th Inf. Div.'s 1st Battalion, 21st Inf. Regiment, and 134 artillerymen from the 52nd Field Artillery Bn. landed at Pusan, a seaport on Korea's southeast coast. They boarded trains and were rushed northward. This ill-fated Task Force Smith, led by LTC Charles B. Smith, was to set up roadblocks to thwart the North Koreans' movement

**American troops engage a North Korean sniper during house-to-house fighting in early 1952.**

**French troops use pack mules to carry much-needed supplies to United Nations forces holding a hilltop position "somewhere in Korea" in October 1951.**

south and cover the arrival of the rest of the division.

Part of the force went to Pyongtaek, the other to Ansong, a village about 10 miles away. The task force's members reached their objectives on July 3. The next day they set up another blocking point 12 miles north of Pyongtaek, near Osan.

Meantime, two understrength

*With the first rays of dawn came a new wave of North Korean troops. "They were like ants; their drab uniforms colored the hillsides," Vincent said.*

battalions of the 34th Inf. Regt., airlifted from Japan, were heading north from Pusan on July 4. Their mission was to reinforce TF Smith's positions.

According to the CMH-produced book "Combat Actions in Korea," an experienced combat officer in one of the battalions new to the 34th Inf., told his company commanders that North Korean soldiers were farther north. They were poorly trained, he said, and only half of them had weapons. They wouldn't be difficult to stop, he said.

"Junior officers had assured their men that after a brief police action, all [of them] would be back [in Japan]," according to the book.

"Officers of the 34th Inf. knew, too, that soldiers from the 21st Inf. were ahead of them in a screening position," Donnelly said. Consequently, many were overconfident.

By daylight on July 5 Smith's battalion occupied the high ground north of Osan. He had orders to "hold in place to gain time," even though his forces might be surrounded. At 7:45 enemy tanks attacked, followed by some 5,000 infantrymen.

After a 4-hour battle, Smith's force was almost surrounded. At 2 p.m. he ordered his men to withdraw. They carried out as many wounded as they could, but were forced to leave their equipment — all but small arms — and some 150 dead soldiers behind.

Six weeks later, Richard and Vincent Krepps arrived in Pusan. The brothers had enlisted in the Army in 1949, right out of high school. Both were assigned to Battery D of the 2nd Inf. Div.'s 82nd Antiaircraft Artillery Bn.

The 2nd Inf. Div. was the first division sent from the United States because it was the only infantry division stationed on the West Coast, Donnelly said.

"Ours was an antiaircraft battalion," Vincent said. "But we were used

**An American M4 Sherman tank moves toward a new position during fighting in the summer of 1952.**

to provide ground firepower. To utilize us, they put us with different regiments, mostly the 9th Inf. Regt."

Vincent became a tank driver. "Dicky," as he was called, became a cannoneer.

Vincent earned a Silver Star for gallantry in action in his first battle, Sept. 1, 1950, near the Naktong River, in Yongsan. The action occurred during the 13 days his unit was deployed along the river, guarding against a North Korean offensive, Vincent said.

"Around midnight on Aug. 31 the sky had suddenly exploded into a terrifying jumble of light and sound. It was an enemy artillery barrage," Vincent said. "For the next 40 minutes we fired back wildly at any flash of light we saw across the Naktong.

"We were all scared," he said. "After we were ordered to cease fire and pull back, we made a long, panicky retreat in total darkness, drawing heavy enemy fire the whole way. Several times the North Koreans were so close that I stood in the hatch of my M19 and fired rounds from my


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## Repatriating U.S. Soldier Remains

IN 1954 the North Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteers returned 4,219 sets of human remains to the United Nations Command, 2,944 of which were believed to be those of U.S. servicemen, said Larry Greer, a spokesman at the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office in Washington, D.C.

Of those, 2,523 were later identified, and the remaining 421 were buried in the Punch Bowl Cemetery in Hawaii as "unknowns."

Between 1991 and 1994 North Korea turned over 208 sets of remains, which they had unilaterally recovered, Greer said. But due to crude recovery techniques, the commingling of remains and a lack of other supporting identifying information, only seven have so far been identified. For this reason, the United States asked the North Koreans to cease unilateral recovery work and invited them to work directly with the Defense Department's POW/Missing Personnel Office.

The first direct talks regarding joint recovery operations were held in Hawaii in January 1996 and were resumed later that year. One joint operation was conducted, and it recovered the remains of one U.S. soldier, who has since been identified and returned to his family for burial with full military honors.

Between 1996 and 1999 the United States and North Korea conducted 12 joint recovery operations, recovering remains

grease gun [M3 submachine gun]." The M19 was a self-propelled antiaircraft artillery weapon that incorporated the hull of an M24 tank and an open turret with two 40mm guns.

"At each new enemy roadblock the columns of American tanks, halftracks, trucks, jeeps and infantrymen slowed to a crawl. And from the surrounding cliffs, the North Koreans lobbed grenades and laid down withering machine-gun fire," Vincent said.

In September 1950, "somewhere south of the Naktong River, my tank was hit," Vincent said. The crew abandoned it and hitched a ride on another tank. Everywhere, there were bodies of American soldiers, twisted in burning vehicles on the side of the road, and in ditches. "The long, bloody night seemed to drag on forever," he said.

With the first rays of dawn came a new wave of North Korean troops. "They were like ants; their drab uniforms colored the hillsides," Vincent said.

He jumped atop a passing tank, which was soon hit. The men abandoned it, sprinted up a hill and faced an ambush. Vincent dived into a ditch. Soon after, he heard the voice of his squad leader, 1LT John Higgins. The young officer had been hit in the neck and was bandaged and bleeding, but back with his men. An M19 was blocking a road, preventing a heavier tank from moving forward to get help. Higgins needed someone to move it, so Vincent accepted what seemed like a suicide mission.

He had to cross 200 yards of

**Dicky *(left)* and Vincent Krepps posed for these photos before shipping out for Korea in August 1950.**

**As North Korean officials look on, members of a U.S. military honor guard accept the remains of an American soldier during a repatriation ceremony at Panmunjom.**

believed to be those of 42 American soldiers. Three have been identified, using the latest forensic techniques, with another 10 nearing identification.

Efforts to obtain the fullest possible accounting and return of remains will continue in 2000, Greer said, with final plans to be negotiated between the United States and North Korea. — *Heike Hasenauer*

*"I drove the M19 through several miles of enemy territory, finally reaching another U.S. position, from which heavy tanks raced out to my unit's position," Vincent said.*

terrain exposed to intense enemy fire. But he made it to the M19 and managed to move it. Then he raced back to the heavy tank and helped lift wounded crewmen onto a personnel carrier. "They told me they couldn't get past other vehicles blocking the road ahead. We were under heavy fire, so I returned to the M19." Two soldiers who were to escort Vincent disappeared.

He did the only thing he could do. "I drove the M19 through several miles of enemy territory, finally reaching another U.S. position, from which heavy tanks raced out to my unit's position," Vincent said.

Four days later he rejoined his battery and was reunited with Dicky. They talked long into the night, about home, girls and what they'd do after the war was over.

Within a week, Dicky was injured and medevaced to Japan. Vincent was wounded a month later and flown to the same hospital, fully believing his brother had been sent home. But Dicky had been returned to the front. According to hospital personnel, the brothers had missed seeing each other by days.

While at the hospital, Vincent also learned from released American prisoners that Higgins had been taken prisoner and killed.

Vincent rejoined his unit, north of Seoul, in December, and was shocked at the deterioration all around him, he said. More than 300,000 Chinese troops had entered the war by then.

Near Kunu-ri and the Chongchon River, U.N. troops had been overwhelmed and forced to retreat. The ensuing action left more than 4,900 men dead or wounded. Much the same occurred on Korea's east coast, near the Chosin Reservoir, where thousands of 7th Inf. Div. soldiers and marines died, he said.

It was then that Vincent learned his brother didn't make it out of Kunu-ri. On Dec. 1, Dicky was declared missing in action.

In the spring of 1951 a relative spotted Dicky's picture in a local newspaper, and the family learned he was a prisoner of war of the Chinese. "In the blurry newspaper photo, he stared mournfully from a group of 11 American POWs being held somewhere near the Yalu River," Vincent said.

When the communists released their lists of POWs after the war, Dicky's name wasn't on it. The family heard nothing more until January 1954, when the Chinese informed the U.S. government that PFC Richard Krepps had died on June 21, 1951, in North Korea's Prison Camp 5 on the Yalu River. They cited pellagra as the cause of death. He had turned 20 a month earlier, on May 21.

The family never received his remains; no dog tags — nothing.

Dicky Krepps was among some

**Dicky Krepps sent home this picture — the last taken of him — in October 1950.**

7,000 allied POWs taken by the North Korean and Chinese armies. Fifty-one percent of the prisoners died, according to records of the Korean War Veterans Association. Donnelly said many U.S. POWs died or were murdered as they were being marched to the POW camps near the Yalu River.

Forty-eight years later, in 1999, Vincent received a response to an Internet search for anyone who had been a POW with Dicky. Ronald D. Lovejoy from Nevada replied.

Lovejoy comforted Dicky during his last days at the camp's so-called hospital, "a place where the sick went to die," Lovejoy said. He had held onto Dicky's wallet for a while, but lost it before leaving the hospital. He did manage to keep a picture from the wallet and gave it to Vincent at a 1999 ex-POW reunion in Macon, Ga.

Finding someone who had been with his brother in his final hours , someone who could fill in some gaps, gave Vincent some long-awaited peace, he said. "I needed to know he had a friend with him at the end, someone who reminded him he was a special human being."

Through the course of the 37-month war that ended on July 27, 1953, 36,940 Americans died. Of those, 33,665 were deaths from hostile action, Donnelly said. Collectively, some 95,000 UNC soldiers had been killed, according to reports in CMH's historical series on the Korean War.

Records of the Korean War Veterans Association indicate 103,284 Americans were wounded, there were 8,176 missing in action and 7,000 prisoners of war. □


**Vincent Krepps finds his brother's name engraved on a Korean War memorial in Pennsylvania, Dicky Krepps' official home of record at the time of his enlistment.**

# Remembering the Korean War

**Story by Heike Hasenauer**

**Ray Donnelly saw extensive combat in Korea as an infantryman with the 24th Infantry Division's 5th Regimental Combat Team.**

RAY Donnelly Jr. was 23 and newly married when he left college in Massachusetts in 1951 to join the Army. Shipped to Korea, he initially served as a .50-caliber machine-gunner in the 5th Regimental Combat Team, part of the 24th Infantry Division.

By the time he got out of the Army he was an infantry first sergeant and the only one of 18 men who shipped out together from Fort Devens, Mass., to return home. One of those who didn't return was Eddie Bunker, from Grand Isles, Maine.

"While we were at Fort Devens, he used to come to my house," Donnelly said. "Today, I still visit his mother and sisters in Maine. His dad had a heart attack and died the day his only son's casket returned home."

"We all have different stories of buddies who didn't come back," said Donnelly, "because we all went over in small groups and stayed close.

"I was on the front line for about 10 months," he continued. "The point system determined how long we were in Korea. When we accumulated 40 points, we were rotated out. We got four points a month if we were on the front line; three, if we were in the rear; one, if we were in Japan."

Being a soldier in combat was, in a broad sense, like working in an office, he said. "One day you're running the copy machine, next day you're running the whole place." Soldiers had to fill gaps left by those who died or shipped out. "You could be a corporal for 30 days and a sergeant for 60 days, and so on up. But the rank wasn't permanent. You could have been a captain and received the pay, then, after the war, become a sergeant again."

Donnelly avoided talking about the fighting, other than to say he earned the Combat Infantryman Badge. "It tells other soldiers everything they need to know about where you've been," he said. "We spent most of our time north of what is now the demilitarized zone, and we used Japanese maps. So I still don't know exactly where we were."

Donnelly said he didn't understand the politics of the time, either. "I didn't know what the war was about, but I knew we had to stop communism there, not here."

During his months of fighting Donnelly said he felt worse for his wife, parents and mother-in-law. "When you're in battle, you know when you're in control. A lot of times you're not shooting. There are moments when things quiet down. But they didn't know where I was, so they worried all the time."

The cold in winter was one of the worst things the soldiers endured, he said. "With the wind chill, it got down to 70 below zero." Donnelly suffered frostbite, and has had a dozen operations on his hands since the war to "clean them out," he said. "The doctor just goes in and scrapes around so I can move my fingers freely again."

Robert MacLean entered the Army in 1948, at 17 years old. He served in Germany until the summer of 1949, when he joined the 377th Transportation Truck Company at Fort Sill, Okla., and almost immediately deployed to Canada for joint maneuvers. He didn't return until spring 1950. When war broke out in Korea, MacLean re-enlisted and shipped out in September.

His first stop was Japan, where he hauled and loaded ammunition for the invasion of Inchon. Once on the peninsula, his unit advanced all the way from Pusan to the Yalu River, in early November, MacLean said. "That's where the Chinese broke us up, and I got captured." He spent 32 months in a POW camp.

"The Army wasn't prepared for that war," MacLean reflected. "Most

**American troops take cover in a recently captured North Korean trench during a counterattack against enemy positions in June of 1951.**


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**Robert MacLean (as a young soldier, *above right,* and today, with his wife Anne, *above)* spent 32 months in a Chinese POW camp.**

of the soldiers were pulled right out of basic training. I had been in the Army for two years, so I knew what we were getting for replacements."

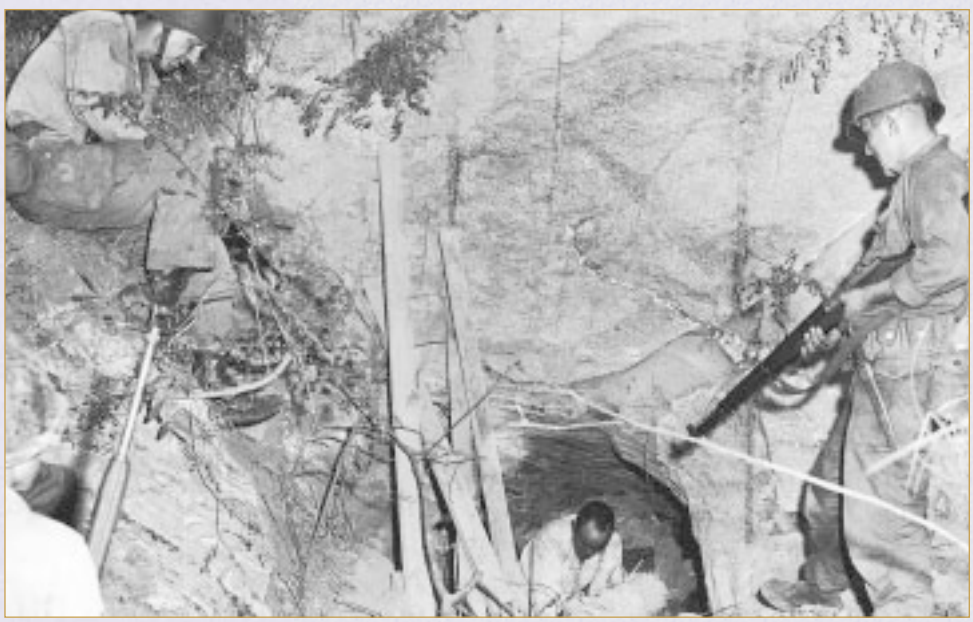
And as far as equipment goes, "everything we had was old at the beginning of the war. The bazookas were no good. The rounds just bounced off the enemy tanks," MacLean said. "We had old, .30-caliber grease guns and machine guns that would freeze up in the cold. Our trucks were in good shape. But, overall, equipment was in short supply."

It was extremely cold and few of the soldiers had proper clothing. Many had frozen fingers and toes, said MacLean, who also suffered frostbite.

"In the POW camp one of our guys got frostbite and gangrene set in," MacLean said. "We had to cut his feet off. Later, the gangrene moved into his legs because we hadn't gotten it all, and we cut his legs off below his knees and stuffed the wounds with maggots, because they eat the infection away. The soldier lived to tell about it."

Fighting was hell, and so was being a POW, said MacLean, who had shrapnel in the groin when he entered the POW camp. "I operated on myself to get it out."

Besides nonexistent medical care, POWs received little food and were forced on many death marches, MacLean said. "We lost a lot of men because of dysentery and poor food. Mostly, our captors fed us cracked corn, like you'd feed chickens. Sometimes we got millet. Most of the time, however, we got nothing. In 1952, the Chinese brought in soybeans. That was



**American troops rout a North Korean soldier from a cave near Inchon following the U.S. landing in September 1950.**

*For many, the greatest pain after the war wasn't the recollections of war's horrors, MacLean said. It was the indifference with which Americans accepted the returning veterans.*

by far the best food we had had."

MacLean said his determination to live saw him through many dark days, including those he spent at the "death house," when he got sick. Another time, he was tortured for six hours because he spoke up for another prisoner who had been ordered to chop wood when he was clearly too sick to do so.

MacLean was once put in solitary confinement for beating up the Chinese guard who had pushed him over a hill.

There were worse things. "One of my friends was put in a wooden box for a year." Amazingly, he survived, MacLean said.

**Wounded U.S. soldiers are treated at a clearing station in early 1952. Nearly 37,000 Americans died in the Korean War.**

For many, the greatest pain after the war wasn't the recollections of war's horrors, MacLean said. It was the indifference with which Americans accepted the returning veterans.

It really wasn't until 1995, with completion of the Korean War Veterans Memorial, that many veterans felt they had received their due, said MacLean, who's today active in the Korean War Veterans Association in Lake Wales, Fla., and is Southeast District representative of the Veterans Administration Volunteer Service.

Donnelly played an important part in the long evolution of the memorial.

In 1987, having retired from federal service and his own business, he agreed to work for 90 days as a volunteer on the Korean War Veterans Memorial Commission at the request of GEN Richard G. Stilwell.

Stilwell had commanded the 15th Inf. Regiment in Korea from 1952 to 1953, and commanded U.N. forces in Korea from 1973 to 1976. He was the commission's chairman from its 1987 inception until his death in 1991. Donnelly worked at the memorial's office regularly for eight years.

"I brought in entertainers, like Bob Hope, and organized 100-car motorcades and did radio and TV interviews with veterans who joined the motorcades that accompanied parts of the memorial as they were being transported to Washington, D.C."

"When the memorial's statues were sent by rail from the foundry in New York to Washington, D.C., we laid them in cribs on flatbeds so the people in the communities we passed through could see them," he said.

About 1,000 people showed up in Delaware, Donnelly said. "Some had their hats over their hearts and their hands on the statues. That's when I felt the depth of it. It was like a religious experience. It put a whole new dimension on it for me. Being remembered — it's very important to the veterans."

Today, thanks in large part to the 50th Anniversary of the Korean War Commemoration Committee; the Republic of Korea government; U.S. Forces, Korea; embassy representatives of Korean war allies; veterans organizations and others, the veterans' stories will be told and heard on a large scale, especially during the commemoration period, June 2000 through July 2003. □

**Troops of the 7th Infantry Division's 32nd Regimental Combat Team trudge up a hill during operations near Chae-jae in 1951.**